

UNCLE BUFORD AND THE ELECTRIC SLIDE

you should hear uncle buford in chill bare language tell about the night he was herded into what he thought was a neighborhood bar by yuppie cowboys who jammed a stetson hat down around his ears with hoots & hollers, got buford in a country line doing kicks, dips & turns in a dance they called the electric slide.

it seems a well-booted real western woman took a longing for buford's style of dancing in his shiny black taxi driver's pants that looked like blue jeans under the spots.

she said she was from beaumont, texas, owned a ten-thousand acre spread filled with longhorn dogies, sipped beam from a pint in her purse, offered buford a second straw, invited buford to her trailer down near railroad avenue where she said she likes to spend the winters.

buford got back to his room last tuesday, said the western woman must have been a helluva rider as he nursed rope burns on wrists & ankles & rowel marks from her spurs around his ears — said he had to turn down her invitation to the big western roundup at madison square garden, at least until he learned some additional steps that would go with that goddamn electric slide.

BUFORD ON THE SHADY SIDE

buford sits on the sambra or shady side of the bullring in tijuana, b.c., when an old retired officianado of the ritual squirts an unerring stream of wine from a goatskin bag into his mouth, wipes with back of hand a wet fu-manchu mustache & turns to buford, "there's an old truism, sēnor, among those who work the ring — if the bull is behind you, run fast as you can to the shelter of the nearest burladero — you may hear horn splintering wood — but your ass will be safe." the translation of his last line became abundantly clear when buford sees her husband standing far below shading his face in the sun, peering up, searching every row, eyes feasting on each seated gringo on the shady side.

BREAKFAST WITH BUFORD

between banging shutters buford could see the filipino chef in his tall grease-spitted hat doing the lambada with a bottle of cooking sherry in one hand & his filet knife in the other. since buford had been waiting for his breakfast, anyway, he decides to remove his trusty drumsticks

from his coat pocket, go into the cave of the chef's cocina, help the chef celebrate his ghost dance by beating rhythm breaks on pots & pans, weaving in the fry smoke, sneaking bits from the chef's breakfast plates lined up behind the kid waiter scared shitless in the corner watching buford & the chef's performance.

BUFORD & THE WALL STREET TRADER

buford finds a wall street journal in the trash bin, circles the hang seng index on the hong kong exchange with the barkeep's pen.

a real tweedy trader sits down, takes an interest, buys buford a beer, whaddya think today? buford points out an undecipherable chinese stock the trader turns the next day into a couple thou profit. he's back asking for buford. dunno, says the bartender. taking another cruise to the bahamas? economic summit? buford could be most anywhere, but i wouldn't wait around.

BUFORD AT THE COUNTY HOSPITAL

i think old buford goes for sour mash like a pig goes for oreo cookies. the nurse seems sensitive to my mission, leaving us alone in his room as i slip a pint of 100-proof beneath his pillow. buford's grip is strong, almost fierce, like an eagle clamps talons on windswept rock. i pour buford a taste in a dixie cup. he whoops & cackles, says something about how you can put lipstick on a pig but it's still a hog. i quiet the old man with another sip, turn off my pocket recorder, i want nothing to get in the way of my ears, trust heart & memory alone to record buford's last stories before the nurse comes back & breaks the spell & the dreary business of dying begins again.

— Ray Clark Dickson

Shell Beach CA

EMBARRASSED

Embarrassed to be watering petunias,
Ted turns his back to passing cars.